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Transition to Self-Reliance

Oct. 21, 2005

Successful referendum in western Al Anbar

1st Lt. Rob Dolan
2nd Marine Division

AL ASAD, Iraq -- The Marines, Soldiers, and Sailors of Regimental Combat Team 2, 2nd Marine Division, along with their partnered Iraqi Security Forces, have helped pave the way for thousands of Iraqi citizens throughout western Al Anbar province to take to the streets and vote in the Iraqi constitutional referendum Oct. 15.

The Iraqis were able to choose whether to accept the constitution their transitional representatives drafted. If the draft constitution passes, there will be a national election Dec. 15 to select representatives for the new Iraqi government. If the constitution is rejected, the current transitional government will dissolve and Iraqis will select another transitional government to draft a new constitution.

The actions of RCT-2 facilitated the democratic process by providing a secure environment for the citizens of western Al Anbar to safely vote. Recently, RCT-2 conducted Operation Kabda Bil Hadid (Iron Fist) in Sa'dah, and Operation Bawwabatu Annaher (River Gate) in the Haditha region to disrupt insurgent activity and provide stability in those cities.

"We were able to go into those regions after not setting foot there for a while, clear out the enemy and establish a permanent presence with bases providing security for the referendum," said Col. Stephen W. Davis, commanding officer, RCT-2.

Coalition forces in western Al Anbar made headway by going after the insurgents' facilitators, financiers, and logisticians. The Regimental Combat Team is attacking the insurgents' network and not individual insurgents.

"In the past, Marines would go into an area during routine operations and the insurgents would flee," said Davis. "Once



Sgt. Jared W. Alexander

An Iraqi citizen from Al Qaim, Iraq, participated in the nationwide Constitutional Referendum Oct. 15 to accept or reject the constitution recently drafted by the Iraqi Transitional Government.

the Marines left, these insurgents would come back to launch an intense murder and intimidation campaign against the local citizens."

Now, with the addition of Iraqi Army troops, RCT-2 is able to provide presence in these areas, providing for both security and stability.

"The Iraqi citizens now know that we are not going anywhere, and the insurgents don't have the ability to contest you when the Iraqi people are assisting you," added Davis.

"We will go where we want, when we want, and do whatever we want to derail the insurgents' game plan and to free local citizens from the insurgents' campaign


of ruthless murder and intimidation," said Davis.

According to Davis, the battle against the insurgency will not be won quickly but will take time and constant vigilance. He also believes the Iraqi people are committed to building a secure and peaceful future with a representative government.

"Voting has taken a tremendous act of courage on behalf of the Iraqi people because they are a smart people and know once they have ink on their finger, they are a marked person," Davis added. "How they vote is up to them. The beauty of a democracy is that you get a right to choose and the fact that they get the opportunity is a milestone of success for the regiment."

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FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
 Low: 58F High: 76F	 Low: 56F High: 78F	 Low: 56F High: 81F	 Low: 61F High: 81F
Sunrise 0614C Sunset 1724C	Sunrise 0614C Sunset 1723C	Sunrise 0615C Sunset 1722C	Sunrise 0616C Sunset 1721C
82%	74%	64%	55%

By Gunnery Sgt. Steven L. Saxton

Letters to the Editor:

*Semper Fi to all our comrades at Camp Fallujah from your Corps of supporters at Frederick/Carroll (Md) Voiture Locale 155, Society of the 40 & 8. We have at least one USMCR still serving. We've been there and thank you Marines for your courage and maintaining a strong tradition in service to our Nation. We support you in every way and if we could, we'd be with you.

Norm Covert, correspondent

*For what it's worth, I know that I, and a lot of others, believe in the Marines and their mission. You all have my eternal gratitude for risking yourselves for our freedom and the freedom of the world. I only hope our Nation can keep its will and see the job done. God Bless.

Steve Grant

Recognize a service member

*"Project Freedom" is a program of the American Security Council Foundation that seeks to inform the American public about the actions of our service members in combat or during reconstruction and humanitarian assistance operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Members are nominated directly to the Foundation through a form on their Web site. Anybody can make the nomination. The Foundation will select members to recognize, develop their stories, and then purchase the necessary air time and newspaper space in order to reach the American public. The below story posted on the DoD Web site describes the program.

Defenselink.mil article:

http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2005/20051004_2921.html

Project Freedom information and submission site:

http://www.ascfusa.org/index.php?option=com_mosforms&Itemid=44

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

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Faith enables us

Chaplain (Cmdr.) Van T. Nguyen
II MEF, Headquarters Group (FWD)



I invite you to read about the catastrophe caused by Hurricane Katrina. On those days, I was away from the parish, but my heart was filled with worries for the people I left behind.

Two weeks after Katrina hit our area, I had news from all of my staff but the deacon and his wife – they have no children, his cell phone did not work. I e-mailed and literally begged him to reply to my note. Finally, when I was already here in Fallujah, his e-mail came.

On Aug. 28, knowing the hurricane was category 5, my deacon and his wife realized their house might not be strong enough to weather the storm. So they decided to go to our church and stayed in a room behind the sanctuary. The next day, Aug. 29, while enduring winds up to 130 mph, they also witnessed the rising of the waters.

First, it flooded the church parking lot, then church floor, the wooden pews started to float. The sanctuary platform, also made by wood, was rising with the level of the water. Soon, they realized the water would continue to rise and they needed to get out of the church. They used the pews as floating devices and finally when the water was high enough, they climbed to the roof of the

church. Staying up there, enduring all the wind gusts and rain until that evening a boat came and evacuated them to safety. They wound up staying with a good Samaritan family in Oklahoma. Recently, they moved back to a town closer to Chalmette, our parish area, and still waiting on the fate of their home.

Another member of my staff was my part-time cook. Just one month before Katrina, she was rushed to the hospital and had an emergency operation on her colon. The doctors found out she was at the border of having cancer and she needed to go through a process of chemo-therapy for six months. She just had the first treatment then came Katrina! Her family had to evacuate to their relatives in Houston. However, her husband decided to stay despite the insistence of the family. He survived the hurricane but had to be rescued by a Coast Guard helicopter some days later. Luckily, one of the hospitals in Houston agreed to continue my cook's treatment. Her son was about to enroll in one of the colleges and her daughter continued studies at a nearby high school. But both she and her husband were unemployed!

Soon after, her textile company sent word to her and announced they will temporarily reopen their shop in Dustin, Florida. At the end, she must follow her company together with her two children, while her husband stays behind. They are starting all over again. At the time she was struggling with the affection of her treatment she was about to give up, she said. The only thing that enabled her to go on was her faith.

She was not the first person to tell me this, several others and I believed many more victims of this disaster have had the same source of consolation and strength.

Fallujah Church Service Schedule

PROTESTANT WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday:

Protestant Worship 9 a.m. CLB-8 theater

Protestant Communion 9:15 a.m. Base Chapel

Contemporary Worship 10:30 a.m. Base Chapel

Gospel Service 1 p.m. Base Chapel

Latter Day Saints (Mormon) 8:30 a.m. Camp Workhorse

Latter Day Saints (Mormon) 6:30 p.m. Camp Workhorse

CATHOLIC MASS / CONFESSIONS

Catholic Confession Sun. 7:15 a.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Sun. 8 a.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Mon. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Tues. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Wed. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Thurs. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Fri. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Confession Sat. 5:15 p.m. Base Chapel

People of Fallujah voice their vote



Lance Cpl. Josh Cox

An Iraqi police officer waves the nation's flag while others load ballots Oct. 14 in preparation for the referendum vote held Saturday.

Staff Sgt. Ronna M. Weyland
II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

FALLUJAH, Iraq -- The streets were quiet as the long awaited day for the referendum began Saturday morning. Vehicle traffic was banned within the city, so the Iraqi police could ensure better security throughout the day.

As the day went on, foot traffic in the predominately Sunni city began to pick up. More and more people were heading to the polls.

"We're seeing grass-roots organizations telling people to vote, not necessarily because it's what they want to do, but because they have to do it," John Kael Weston, a State Department official in Fallujah said. "They realize that if they don't participate they don't have a lot of other options."

Local officials and the U.S. ambassador to Iraq met in the Civil-Military Operation Center here to discuss the future of the city still recovering from the battle less than a year ago.

"In order for the political and security system to work you need jobs for people," said Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, during his first trip to Fallujah. "Iraq is an extremely rich country and God willing it will become great and prosperous again."

Members of the Fallujah City Council had the opportunity to ask the U.S. ambassador questions and share their concerns.

"We ask you to put pressure on the [Iraq] government to release the funds for repairs," said Sheikh Kamal Shawkur, chairman of the city council. "Our people are homeless from their houses being destroyed and people are still living in tents."

The mayor of Fallujah said he believed the people would show up to vote because it was the right thing to do.

"They realized when they went to the ballot box they held the future of Iraq in

their hands," said Sheikh Dhari Al-Zobaie, city mayor. "I asked them why they came to vote and they said, 'We want an Iraq

for all Iraqis not just one particular group.' The people are committed to Iraq's progress and success."

Before leaving, the ambassador said the people of Fallujah could count on the United States to help get them back on their feet.

"The terrorists want a civil war... that is not a formula for success," said Khalilzad.

He also added the

past is finished. It is gone and it is now time to look to the future of Iraq.

'We're seeing grass-roots organizations telling people to vote, not necessarily because it's what they want to do, but because they have to do it.'

John Kael Weston
U. S. State Department



Cpl. Evan M. Eagan

Residents of Fallujah walk near a voting site during Saturday's referendum vote in Iraq.

CLB-8 helps secure Fallujah's polling sites

Sgt. Josh H. Hauser

2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Marines assigned to Transportation Support Company, Combat Logistics Battalion 8, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD), took to the streets here on the eve of Iraq's vote in the constitutional referendum to help ensure Iraqi voters could head to the polls with peace of mind.

Working under the cover of darkness, Transportation Company rolled into some of the city's neighborhoods in order to position more than 100 concrete barriers around a number of polling sites.

"Work methodically, safely, stay alert and move quickly," Lt. Col. Francis X. Carroll, CLB-8 commanding officer, told the Marines prior to their mission. "We will be successful tonight and when we are, it will be another nail in the insurgency's coffin."

Once designated as an insurgent stronghold, this city of more than 100,000 is now another foothold in Iraq's climb toward a free and democratic country. Many of the Marines working in Fallujah's streets and alleyways were a part of last year's Operation Phantom Fury, a coalition offensive that ousted the majority of insurgents from the city.

"Lots of us have been here many times before, so we're familiar with the area and know the town," said 22-year-old Pvt. Sonny W. Pesek, a logistics vehicle system operator.

The native of Lombard, Ill., said the unit's ultimate goal is to help the people of Iraq establish their government.

"They had to have some sort of security at the polling sites and our job is to provide the support for that," he said. "It's a great honor knowing we're helping them establish a free country. It's something that will always be with me."

That sentiment seems to resonate amongst all of the unit's Marines, according to Cpl. Anthony P. Massa, a 20-year-old New York native assigned to CLB-8's Transportation Company.

Normally a motor transportation operator,

Massa was in charge of the security element needed in order for the unit to work safely throughout the night. His job was to place Marines where they could keep a watchful eye out for anyone or anything that seemed out of place. The particular neighborhood where his unit operated contained narrow alleyways and multi-storied buildings rising up from the streets on either side of them, introducing their own challenges into the operation.

"It was difficult because the area provided more places for [insurgents] to hide," he said of his Marines patrolling past vacant vendor booths of rice and fruits. "But our mission was to get those barriers into place no matter what. If it meant getting in a firefight for six hours, then so be it."

Fortunately, that wasn't the case. The Marines had slated six hours to accomplish the task, but as it turned out they needed just over three, noted 1st Lt. Ian J. Garvey, a platoon commander with the company.

Garvey, a 25-year-old native of St. Paul, Minn., credits his Marines' success with the amount of coordination, planning and sheer commitment of those within the company.

"The Marines rehearsed, prior to going

out, what they would do in any event," he said. "They did an outstanding job and executed the plan flawlessly. We were working in an area deemed a high threat level due to the number of IED and small arms fire attacks in the recent weeks, but I had full confidence that any enemy attack would have been repelled by these Marines."

As Iraqis headed to the polls Oct. 15 for another round of elections, many were probably unaware of the efforts of those in Transportation Company. However, applause is not the sought-after response by the Marines, according to Garvey. Being able to help provide the citizens of Iraq a secure opportunity to vote is credit enough and fuels them in their day-to-day drive to accomplish whatever task is placed before them.

"We want our efforts to mean something here," Garvey said. "We hope our sacrifices, and those of our friends who haven't made it back, works toward this country being free."

As for the determination of the Iraqis to get out and vote, Garvey said, "It was risky when our founding fathers revolted against Britain, but there was a purpose behind it. I think the people here see what others in the world have and want to dictate their own future."



Sgt. Josh H. Hauser

Marines assigned to Transportation Support Company, Combat Logistics Battalion 8, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD), worked under the cover of darkness in order to help provide secure polling sites in the city of Fallujah.

Sailors in Iraq celebrate the Navy's birthday

Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott R. Beutler
30th Naval Construction Regiment (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq — In times of peace and times of war, all across the globe, Oct. 13 is a day of celebration for United States Sailors. On this day in 1775, the Continental Navy was established, known today as the U.S. Navy. The Continental Congress voted to outfit two small ships with arms, and sent them to intercept transport ships supplying arms and provisions to British forces.

Although in the midst of bringing stability to Iraq, the II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD) organized a celebration for the Sailors of II MEF (FWD), including the Seabees of 30th Naval Construction Regiment (FWD).

Marines stood side-by-side with the Seabees and Sailors to celebrate the occasion and wish them happy birthday.

Although there was no pomp and circumstance that traditional celebrations have, the lack of formalities had no effect on the atmosphere.

The chief petty officers of the 30th NCR served dinner to all with a "happy birthday" greeting and a smile.

"It's an honor and privilege to be able to do this (serve meals to the troops) on the Navy's birthday," said Chief Petty Officer Jose Capellan.

The dinner was typical of the meals served at the dining facility, and the attire consisted of desert camouflage combat utility uniforms. There were no candles on the tables or fancy table cloths, nevertheless, the Sailors and Marines were grateful.

"We're in a combat environment, taking time to recognize our traditions," said Chief Warrant Officer Troy Whiteman about II MEF providing the celebration.

The commanding general of II MEF (FWD), Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Johnson, the guest speaker, spoke of the Navy core values of honor, courage, commitment and the

traditions that Sailors of today continue to maintain.

"You are a committed people, committed to country and service," he said. "You are honorable. You are a courageous people. Be proud of all the Navy core values."

Johnson commented on the projects the Seabees are working on and all that the Seabees have done in Iraq. He said, "Seabees build structures and make a pathway on the battlefield. You are making a difference in Iraq, you are making progress."

"Seven months ago, 2,500 Iraqi Security Force troops stood up. 15,000 ISF have now stood up. There were no governments providing service, and they (local governments) are functioning. In two days they are going to vote on a referendum. That is progress," he said.

Johnson completed his address with some simple advice. He said, "Reflect on the things you've seen in this country. Take

that back to America. Let America know what you've seen."

"Take back the fact how lucky you are to be American and people (Sailors) like you are willing to wake up and battle the dark side," said Johnson.

Just prior to the custom of cutting cake, a bugler appeared and began playing *Anchors Aweigh*, the Navy anthem. All in attendance proudly stood and sang the words to the music.

Following Navy tradition, the oldest Sailor, Cmdr. Albert F. Dinicola, passed the first cut piece of the cake to the youngest Sailor, Seaman Michael K. Kelly, hospitalman.

Little did our forefathers know the course of action to protect liberty would evolve into a Navy that continues today to fight for peace and defend freedom on a world wide scale. The U.S. Navy is not only the largest and most powerful Navy; it is the finest Navy in the world.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott R. Beutler

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD) Command Master Chief Joseph B. Langholtz cuts the first piece of the Navy birthday cake. As with tradition, the first piece goes to the oldest Sailor present, Cmdr. Albert F. Dinicola, who passes the cake to the youngest Sailor, Seaman Michael K. Kelly, hospitalman.

Ambulance driver aids service members

Lance Cpl. Josh Cox

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- One country boy from Hilmar, Calif., ensures service members receive medical attention here, while on his third deployment since joining the Corps three years ago.

Cpl. Daniel W. Phipps, ambulance driver, Battalion Aid Station, Combat Logistics Battalion 8, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD), works with Navy corpsmen to aid service members here.

"I work with the CLB-8 BAS...[we] support all medical coverage on and off base for the unit," he said.

Like many Marines deployed here, the 21-year-old has a huge responsibility resting on his shoulders at a very young age.

"I usually do emergency calls around base, and [I] go on convoys occasionally," he said. "[Earlier in the deployment] I was also the driver for the mobile surgical unit that goes with the grunts to provide front line surgical capabilities in case Marines get hurt."

Before becoming a Marine, Phipps grew up in a slow-paced town on the West Coast.

"I came from a small country town in the central valley of California," said the 2002 Hilmar High School graduate. "It was all corn fields, orchards and dairies. I used to work as a diesel and tractor mechanic."

Phipps said he discovered the Marine Corps while traveling to visit family as a child.

"When I was a kid, I would go visit my uncle in Nevada, and on the way we would pass the Marine base in Bridgeport, Calif.," he said. "I always thought Marines were [hard core] back then, and I wanted to be one ever since."

Phipps decided to enlist in the Marine Corps when he was a junior in high school.

"I enlisted right around Sept. 11, 2001, and went to boot camp on Sept. 9, 2002 after doing around a year in the Delayed Entry

Program," he said. "I picked my job to be motor transportation while I was in the DEP, and after military occupational specialty school they sent me right to 2nd FSSG at Camp Lejeune, N.C."

In the two years Phipps has been in the Corps, he has been on three deployments, and recently volunteered to extend here.

"For my first deployment, I went to Djibouti, Africa [with] Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa," he said. "About two months after I got back from there, they sent me straight to Haiti. I got some time off after that and came to Iraq in February. I extended and now I get to do another seven months out here."

Phipps said there are a lot of benefits that come with being a Marine.

"I would have to say that I like the traveling the best," he said. "I was never too interested in traveling until I joined the military, and now I want to go everywhere. I also like the respect and support we get."

There are also challenges that come

with being a Marine, especially while on a deployment.

"The biggest challenge would be being away from family," he said. "All my family is on the West Coast and I grew up really close to them. I never thought I would miss so many big events in the family."

Even though Phipps is away from his loved ones, he works hard to aid in operations here and strives to learn as much as he can about the medical field.

"I'm proud to be a part of the war on terrorism," he said. "I just like being able to learn all the medical stuff the [corpsmen] teach me. It's good stuff to know, especially out here, and I'm glad to know it just in case I ever have to use it."

Phipps said he has been able to do many things in the Marine Corps, but looks forward to several events he hasn't been able to participate in.

"I pretty much just want to pick up sergeant and go to a Marine Corps Ball," he said. "I think I've done everything else I wanted to do."



Lance Cpl. Josh Cox

Cpl. Daniel W. Phipps, ambulance driver, Battalion Aid Station, Combat Logistics Battalion 8, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD), sits in his ambulance here Oct. 6.

Man's best friend patrols beside Marines

Cpl. Adam C. Schnell
2nd Marine Division

HADITHA DAM, Iraq -- The use of dogs as guardians of military camps to protect against surprise attacks dates back to ancient Egypt. Today, dogs are not only guarding bases but also patrolling with Marines of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, in Iraq.

Sergeant James J. Wasmer, a Chatham, Mass., native, and his search dog, Euro, are one K-9 team busy doing weapons cache sweeps and entry control point searches to keep citizens of Iraq and Marines safe. Recently the team conducted a sweep with the battalion's Company L to look for weapons caches and other explosives in the area.



Cpl. Adam C. Schnell

Sergeant James J. Wasmer, a Chatham, Mass., native, and his search dog, Euro, attached to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, take a water break during a recent weapons and explosive sweep here.

"We didn't find any weapons caches, but we did find an AK-47 during the sweep," commented Wasmer, a specialized search dog handler.

To be ready for missions like the ones they are currently involved in, the handler and the dog must go through extensive training. The teams go through a training cycle at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, lasting 60 to 90 days, depending on the dog, said Wasmer.

"They are taught to associate a scent with a treat or toy when searching for explosives," he said. "When they smell an explosive, they sit. As soon as he sits, he will get a treat."

For the handler, an extra four months after military police school is spent in a military working dog course at the Air Force base. They learn how the dogs are trained and how to be one of the few in the unique job field.

"When I heard that I could be a dog handler for the Marine Corps, I jumped at the chance because it sounded like a really cool job to have," said the 1995 graduate of Chatham High School. "I always liked dogs and thought it would give me a chance to do something besides basic [military police] things."

Even though being a dog handler is a rewarding and unique job field in the Marines, there is a lot of extra work involved. When deployed, they live with the dogs and care for them 24 hours a day.

"It is almost like having a 2-year-old around all the time," said Wasmer, chuckling. "They are very demanding and it is a seven day-a-week job, even in the rear."

In the rear, meaning at bases in the United States, is where he has spent almost seven years working with dogs searching vehicles at the gates and on bases for drugs and explosives. He has spent the last eight months in Iraq and his job has changed a lot.

"We do improvised explosive device hunts and continue to work sweeping areas for weapons caches," he commented. "We have already found 155 mm rounds and other weapons since we got out here. So hopefully we will find more."

With several dozen Marine and Air Force specialized military search dog teams operating on different military bases in Iraq, the dogs are being used more and more. According to Wasmer, the dogs were not always used in deployed areas.

"They tried using the dogs for the same reason back in 1991, but it didn't work that well," he said. "So when [Operation Iraqi Freedom] came around, the Marine Corps decided to try and use the dogs again."

Wasmer doesn't just use Euro to patrol with the Marines of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. When he is not on a mission, he walks the dog around the camp to let Marines pet and play with him.

"It is a really great morale booster for the Marines," he said. "It reminds some of them of home. They always say to me how much they miss their dogs back home."

Brothers watch each other's backs in Iraq

Cpl. Evan M. Eagan
II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- After serving nearly 13 years in the Marine Corps respectively, two brothers with 8th Communication Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group, II MEF (FWD), have found themselves side-by-side in the same unit serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom here.

Gunnery Sgt. Frank Ashworth and Staff Sgt. Nick Ashworth are brothers separated in age by 14 months, but seem more like best friends catching up on old times.

Raised in Grants Pass, Ore., the brothers were raised by their mother.

Their father, a Marine veteran who served three tours of duty in Vietnam, passed away when they were young.

According to Nick, joining the Marine Corps was something he wanted to do since he could talk.

"I decided I was going to join when I was 4-years-old," said Nick, 31, maintenance chief, Engineer Platoon, Charlie Company, 8th Comm., Bn. "Basically when I could say it. Then it took me about three months to convince my brother to join."

Frank was attending community college and working when his brother entered the delayed entry program. Soon after, Frank and Nick were in the buddy program and getting ready to ship to Ma-

rine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.

"We were supposed to go in on the buddy program, but the recruiter needed someone to fill a spot early," said Frank, 32, first sergeant for Charlie Company, 8th Comm. "Even though I enlisted first, he got to ship first," added Nick.

Growing up in a small town that was big on sports, the brothers were constantly in competition with each other.

"We were very competitive growing up," said Nick, while laughing. "Whether it was girls, wrestling, football, track, cross country, anything competitive we had to do it."

"That's why we were so good at it," added Frank. "Anything from ice cream to prom dates, we were competing for it."

As the Charlie Company 1st Sergeant, Frank is in charge of more than 250 Marines. He makes sure they are taken care of, staying out of trouble and dealing with them when they do.

Now, one of those Marines under his watch is his younger brother, who also doubles as his roommate.

"It's just like old times," said Frank, as the brothers erupted into laughter. "We play practical jokes on each other all the time. I'll put shaving cream on his face or put his hand in warm water when he's sleeping to make him walk a half-mile to use the bathroom."

The brothers are on their first deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, however, Nick served in Operation Desert Strike in 1996, but says this one is a lot easier.

"It's the easiest deployment I've ever done," he said. "I always have somebody [around me], all the time. Operation Desert Strike was more depressing and more lonely, especially since we were heading toward the Philippines on the 13th [Marine Expeditionary Unit] and they called us back and sent us to Iraq."

Frank agrees having his brother close makes it a more enjoyable experience.

"I miss family and friends at home, but it's nice to have a major piece here," he said. "Most people have to write back home to talk about their frustrations. I can go home and vent on him."

Never short on insults for each other, the brothers enjoy trading verbal blows. Whether they're arguing about who received the best genes from their parents or who rates the most ribbons, they never miss an opportunity to spread the brotherly love.

"When Frank was born, our parents saw the prototype and thought they could do a lot better so they had me," said Nick, with Frank adding, "No, they saw a vision of perfection and thought they might be able to do a little better, but they were wrong."

The Ashworth brothers will remain in Iraq until early next year, but until then, the sibling rivalry continues.

"It's all about bragging rights and we are rivals," said Frank.



Cpl. Evan M. Eagan

Gunnery Sgt. Frank Ashworth, 32, first sergeant for Charlie Company, 8th Communication Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group, II MEF (FWD), and Staff Sgt. Nick Ashworth, 31, maintenance chief, Engineer Platoon, Charlie Company, 8th Comm., Bn., II MHG, II MEF (FWD), are brothers serving in the same unit in Iraq.